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THE FOUNDLING.

A Village Tale.

BY CHARLES ONSLOW.

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THE FOUNDLING.

A Village Tale.

Crimes, like chains, are linked together,
  Sins, like suns,—they never set;
Eve but touched a little apple—
  Heaven and earth are trembling yet.

IN a pretty little village,
  On a pleasant summer night,
When the trembling stars were hiding
  From the dawn's returning light;
There was silence all about it,
  A deep stillness of repose,
As if Nature, being weary,
  Had just dropped into a doze.

But the peaceful quiet was broken
By the hurried tread of feet,
And a baby, soundly sleeping,
Was left helpless on the street;
Then the morning broke in crimson,
As if blushing to behold,
In the midst of so much shelter,
One poor lamb without a fold.

From a dreamy sleep awakened,
With the cry of one distressed,
Seeking wildly some fond mother,
To enfold it to her breast;
While the little lips are trembling,
And the tears of sorrow flow,
Pleading in their liquid language
For compassion on its woe.

Why so frightened, little trembler?
There are Christian homes all 'round,
Other mothers will caress you,
Though your own were never found;
Lo! Yon proudly lifted steeple,
Like a mighty arm stretched high,
Seems to offer you assistance
From a source above the sky.

See, the neighbors quickly gather,
Gazing at the lonely child,
While as if now sure of succor,
Looking up, it sweetly smiled;
Who will take this little stranger?
Oh! how happy you would be,
If at last you heard the Saviour
Say "Ye did it unto Me."

This poor infant, like an offering
On Pride's altar laid and bound,
Begs with piteous cries for mercy
From the worshippers around;
But all useless the wild pleadings,
Every heart seems turned to stone;
Every hand is raised against it,
And once more it weeps alone.

Jesus, when a babe, was homeless,
But He had a mother's care,
And a palace or a stable
Is a heaven, if mother 's there;
And when Moses for his safety
On a river's bank was thrown,
Miriam's watchful eyes were o'er him—
This poor babe lay all alone.

Rizpah watched her lifeless children
Night and day, through cold and heat,
While their bodies swung above her—
It was Love that chained her feet.
"Mother!" Oh, what music lingers
'Round that name, so dearly bought;
Could you not protect one living,
When your love was all it sought?

A young maiden, poor and homeless,
With a heart of pity blest,
Lifting up the mislaid jewel,
Clasped it fondly to her breast;
Hurried with it to the poorhouse,—
What is labor, where there 's love?—
And a hungry baby nestling
On your bosom, like a dove?

When she reached the house, a matron
With a pleasant word and smile,
Kindly bade the maiden enter,
In a manner free from guile;
On the records quickly written,
These few words were then enrolled,
"Nameless foundling, healthy female,
Neatly dressed, some five months old."

Then the maid and infant parted,
One with tears she could not check,
When the other's tiny fingers
Were unclasped from 'round her neck;
While she kissed the baby's dimples,
Gently soothed her rising fears,
Called her "precious," named her "Daisy"
Christened her with blinding tears.

Back to duty, then the matron
Gave her orders quick and clear,
"Feed that child, then wash and dress it,
'Twas a shame to send her here;"
Something in the matron's bearing,
Tall and graceful, stern yet kind,
Made the very paupers love her,
Glad to serve and quick to mind.

An old nurse, herself deserted
By the children she had raised,
Though when others sought to blame them,
The old mother always praised;
Said that "Jane was only careless."
That "poor Will was dead and gone,"
But admitted, oft with tears,
She had "hoped for more from John."

This poor woman, known as "Maggie,"
Took the foundling in her care,
From its neck removed a ribbon,
Some kind hand had fastened there;
On it was a golden locket,
And a letter hid within,
Written finely, telling plainly,
Of a mother's grief and sin.

Poor old Maggie could not read it,
For her eyes were old and dim,
And her glasses, once her husband's,
Only made her think of him;
How, when dying, he had taken
Them away from his closed eyes,—
She was kneeling,—he was praying
God to join them in the skies.

She was happy when this infant,
Like an angel, came to cheer
With a loving, trusting nature,
Life's dull pathway cold and drear;
With her trembling hands she fed it,
Gently bathed it when undressed,
Bared her own poor withered bosom,
Pressed it naked to her breast.

Words are worthless, they deceive us—
Hearts, like altars, lose their fires,
But our actions, like great pulses,
Tell the strength of our desires.
Love, 'tis like the flashing lightning,
Reason is the thunder's roll,
Prudence grants of love, a portion,
Pity, God-like, gives the whole.

The good matron, softly entering,
Saw the baby smiling there,
With her fingers slowly twining
Through the nurse's thin grey hair;
"Dress that child this very instant,"
Was her order as she frowned,
But her very tones revealed her,
There was kindness in their sound.

Sitting down beside the foundling,
Maggie offered her the note,
And she read it slowly, sadly,
With a choking in her throat:
"To whoever finds my baby,
God must pay you for her care;
I have nothing, a poor outcast,
Shunned and hated everywhere.

The Mother's Appeal.

"Oh! pity my child. You may blame or despise me.
Protect the sweet bud, though you hate the vile brier;
May her life be unspotted and pure as the lilies
That blossom in beauty though rooted in mire.

"Oh! how often I've felt her warm breath on my bosom
As lonely I lay on my pillow at night,
Till I dreamed that her father had come to protect us,
But while I was kissing him, vanished from sight.

"To rescue my child I must fly from her presence,
Desert to protect, and do wrong for the best,
Like the bird that flies wildly away when there's danger,
And hides, by her absence, the young in their nest.

"Farewell, for my life will have ended to-morrow,
And the river's dark waters roll over my head;
But if ever my darling should ask you about me,
Only tell her I loved her, but long have been dead."

* * * * * * * *

At the letter's sad conclusion,
Maggie pressed the foundling's face
To her bosom, gently, softly,
In a long and fond embrace;
The bright locket on the mantle
Caught the matron's watchful eye,
With her jewel'd hand, she took it
And unclasped it with a sigh.

There encased she saw the likeness
Of a woman's lovely face,
Almost speaking, really smiling,
With a look of wondrous grace;
Glancing quickly at the infant
The same outlines met her view,
Only softer in expression
Were the baby's eyes of blue.

Bending down she kissed the foundling,
Gave some orders for its care,
Cut a pretty golden ringlet
Of the infant's soft brown hair;
Winding it around the locket,
Wrapping both within the note,
Tied them with a narrow ribbon
Taken from the baby's throat.

In her parlor after supper,
  At a window looking out,
She sat thinking, almost dreaming,
  Of the misery all about;
From the distant rooms a murmur,
  Of the paupers' voices, came,
And sometimes a dismal thumping
  By the crutches of the lame.

She looked glorious as the twilight,
  Like a gauzy veil, disclosed
A soft beauty almost heavenly
  That upon her now reposed;
She was young, not over thirty,
  And her mind was firm and strong,
Often had the paupers boasted:
  "Anna Grey can't do no wrong."

As she lingered at the window,
  Darkness covered all below,
Like an ocean rolling onward,
  With a steady silent flow;
But above was heaven's morning,
  Stars and planets glittered there,
While the Christian matron bowing,
  Offered up her evening prayer.

The Matron's Prayer.

"O God, Thy power and wisdom shine,
In glittering characters above,
We scan thine alphabet divine,
But oh! it tells not half Thy love.

"By faith we search through heaven's dome,
Where Thy creative works are done,
And in Thy family, at Thy home,
Approach Thee, leaning on Thy Son.

"He takes our burdens in his arms,
Joins his own pleadings with our own,
While we shrink back behind his charms,
And wait an answer from the Throne.

"Oh! Grant that while my soul must bear
Life's burdens till by death set free,
That I may often, when in prayer,
Catch a bright glimpse of heaven and Thee.

"Then should wild passions light their fires,
I'll throw them burning from my breast,
And in the strength that heaven inspires,
Sink calmly, peacefully to rest."

In that grand and lofty building
Standing proudly on a farm,
There were hundreds, poor and lonely,
Fed and sheltered from all harm.
It is night, and as a mother
Shuts her children in, to rest,
So has evening, slowly, softly,
Dropped her curtains in the west.

When the midnight stars were shining,
Daisy lay in sweet repose,
Nestling on the nurse's bosom,
Both unconscious of their woes;
Faithful Maggie softly slumbered,
With a smile of loving pride,
Dreaming of the happy by-gones
Ere she had become a bride.

'Twas a blissful hour for Maggie,
Once again at home she seems,
Light at heart, and gay and happy—
Lives a girl again, in dreams.
Sleep it is the soul's theatre,
Where, in dreams, bright spirits play,
With our fancies for the footlights
Turning darkness into day.

Maggie's Dream.

She stands in her father's old farmhouse again,
And can see his hired reapers at work in the grain,
While away in a meadow the cattle are seen
Half hid in an ocean of blossom and green;
There 's a field of bright corn far away on a hill
Standing proudly in ranks, like an army at drill,
With high nodding plumes and gay banners unroll'd,
While they hide in silk purses their treasures of gold.

She can see her old father far off on the farm,
As he stands by a tree with a rake on his arm,
She can hear her own mother sing plaintive and low,
When who should walk in but her very first beau;
'Twas her father's poor plow-boy, grown almost a man,
Whose cheeks fair and ruddy the sun could not tan,
Brave stalwart and tall, and her friends often said—
"He was like a young lion she held with a thread."

She runs from the house and jumps into the swing,
'Tis her lover, bareheaded, pulls hard at the string,
He laughs as he spins her around like a top,
Till with tears and entreaties she begs him to stop;
In playful displeasure she grasps at his hair,
But he runs to the barn, and she follows him there,
Climbs up to the peak, where in hiding he lay,
When they jump both together right down on the hay.

She has caught him at last, and his struggles are vain,
As she cuffs him, and pounds him, and cuffs him again,
Until by the effort her strength has grown weak,
When she feels his first loving kiss burn on her cheek;
She springs from his arms, and slips down to the floor,
And runs to the house, but has scarce reach'd the door,
When up from the road came a buggy so bright
That its gleams in the sunshine quite dazzles her sight.

'Twas a rich neighbor's son, with his fast-stepping horse.
When invited to ride she said gaily "of course,"
Climbing up to the seat with her curls full of hay,
Then laughing, and chatting, they start on their way;
She can see her poor lover's sad look of surprise,
As he stands by the gate there are tears in his eyes,
But she throws him some kisses, with both of her hands,
And loves him most dearly as lonely he stands.

She had known him from childhood as tender and kind,
Always willing to aid and obedient to mind,
He was truthful and honest, courageous and true,
A hero in rags, as his comrades well knew;
She hates her companion, but likes his fine clothes,
'Twas her pride that admitted him one of her beaux.
Now he boasts of his father's great riches and gains,
But in struggling to kiss her, he loses the reins.

With a quick sudden rush like the flash of a gun,
She sees the proud horse dashing off on a run,
With leaps of wild terror as often he feels,
The lines that are dragging, like snakes, at his heels ;
She sees her companion sneak off from her side,
He has left her alone on that perilous ride,
But she clings to the seat, and looks piteously back,
And she sees the poor plow-boy—he is following her track.

She can see him as madly he runs like a hound,
And seems with great leaps to fly over the ground,
He comes nearer and nearer—is whiter than snow—
And she hears—'tis like thunder—his terrible "Whoa!"
With the bound of a tiger he springs past the wheels,
And seizes the horse till he staggers and reels,
Then he holds out his arms and she falls on his breast,
Forgetting all danger while by him caress'd.

* * * * * * * * *

Now the scenes are all changed, it is winter and night,
There is snow on the ground, clear, dazzling and white,
The moon shines above, like the headlight on high
Of an incoming train from some world in the sky ;
While Sirius burns brightly his signal light clear,
And Rigel's blue lantern seems wondrously near,
Aldebaran trembles as if in affright
At sleepy old Algol for hiding his light.

The farmhouse stands near, but is woefully dark,
Save a light in the attic that beams like a spark,
'Tis from Maggie's own room,—she is sitting alone,—
As she hears on her window the tap of a stone;
She trembles to think of her father's stern frown
As she raises the sash, looking timidly down,
'Tis her poor lover there, he would make her his bride,
And he beckons, and begs her, to come to his side.

Her fears bid her stay, but her love is so great,
She can dare any danger and face any fate,
Leave father, and mother, and houses, and lands,
Lay her fortune, her honor, her life in his hands,
She will give him her body who rescued her life,
For the promised reward is the proud name of wife.
O Love! thou art blind, thou dost cling to a soul
Though the river of life to a cataract roll.

She silently steps from her room to the hall,
And trembles with fear as she follows the wall,
'Till she reaches the stair, and the rail for a guide,
Then, slowly descending, a door opens wide,
And her father stands frowning, demanding to know,
"What errand she has, or what business to go?"
But she springs past his side like a wild frightened deer,
When—hark! 'tis his curses that fall on her ear.

She reaches the door, it is bolted and bar'd,
But she opens a window and leaps to the yard,
Her lover is there, she can feel his strong arm,
And is held like a babe as he runs from the farm;
O'er his shoulder she sees there are men in pursuit,
And she knows that her father has threatened to shoot,
But she clings to her lover and kisses his cheek,
While he runs with new vigor her safety to seek.

But her foes are approaching alarmingly near,
Like a pack of wild wolves in pursuit of a deer,
And ahead of them all, on the crust of the snow,
She can see as their leader her former rich beau;
He is maddened to lose her, his rival he hates
And wildly pursues her, then halts, and awaits,
For, lo! she is safe in her lover's poor hut,
The shutters are closed and the double door shut.

'Twas his poor mother's roof, he was born in that shed,
And the foe that would enter, must wait till he's dead.
His mother has fainted and fallen in fright,
Then he opens the door, and steps out in the night;
She can see his proud form, as he faces the crowd,
Who shrink from his presence affrighted and cowed.
She had loved him before, but she worships him now,
And his locks seem like laurels encircling his brow.

He has turned to come in, when O horrors! a flash!
And a bullet flies into the house with a crash,
'Twas his rival who ran, but who turned as he fled,
And fired; fatal shot,—the poor mother lies dead.
The lion may be tamed or the tiger be caged,
Yet the sight of fresh blood will make either enraged.
So her lover's wild frenzy she well understands,
'Tis his own mother's life-blood that drips on his hand s

He threw himself down by his mother and cried,
"O mother! my mother! for you I'd have died."
He was wet with her blood and was red with its stain,
'Till it seem'd to poor Maggie that both had been slain;
But see! in the door! he is aiming a blow,
With the butt of a gun, at his down-fallen foe,
He thinks he has wounded, and now he will kill;
'Tis her poor lover's rival that stands on the sill.

Her shrieks warn her lover, he springs to his feet,
His cheeks flushed with passion's wild feverish heat.
His eyes flash like lightning, oh! dreadful the sight
Of his frown, it would turn a wild tiger to flight;
His rival is conquered by terror alone,
And begs for his life, on his knees, with a groan;
For his lips cannot utter a word,—he is dumb,—
And awaits, with a shudder, for vengeance to come.

The panther may pause, and awhile stand at bay,
Or the leopard may leap and fall short of his prey,
Yet escape will be brief, he renews the attack
Until the poor victim lies dead on its back;
But her lover's wild passions were held in control
By a power that was greater,—there was love in his soul.
See! he offers his hand and he raises the slave,
It were manly to kill; it was God-like to save.

She had loved, she had worshipped, but now she adores,
And falls on her knees and his pardon implores.
"'Twas for me you have suffered," she cries through her tears,
When, lo! like a monarch, her lover appears;
His robes are of purple and gold, finely wrought,
The hut is a palace, the room is a court,
And he sits on a throne with his guards standing near,
Who listen in silence his orders to hear.

There are throngs of great nobles and men of the state.
There are courtiers to praise him, and ladies in wait,
And among them her father and mother she sees,
While her former rich lover stands there at his ease;
Then the king rises up, and he steps from the throne,
He calls her by name and he calls her his own.
His diamonds and jewels, how dazzling they seem.
She awoke from her slumber—it was only a dream.

* * * * * * * *

Life is lonely to the aged,
In a poorhouse doomed to dwell,
There ambition droops and withers,
'Tis an active spirit's hell;
But to childhood joy is given,
Youth can laugh, yet want for bread;
While the miser, with his money,
Lives in constant fear and dread.

Daisy grew in strength and beauty;
Weeks and months, like princes, brought
Each some precious gift, to bless her,
Wondrous was the change they wrought.
Maggie's life has changed to sunshine,
Joy and hope revive from death,
Love's dull embers, now rekindled,
Blaze beneath an infant's breath.

When the other paupers gathered
From the common table fed—
Maggie's place was at the matron's,
With a greater bounty spread.
On one evening, when permitted
By the overseer to stay,
There she heard him tell this story
In his simple, pleasant way:

The Overseer's Story.

A quiet city never famed or great,
Built on a hillside in a neighboring State,
Had this one honor, 'twas the county seat,
And there at stated times the court would meet.

Some months ago, just in the early Fall,
Court was in session in the great town hall;
The room was crowded with a jostling throng
Of anxious people who had waited long,
And, when admitted, frantic'ly had raced
Down the wide aisle in unbecoming haste,
Fighting an elbow battle at each pew,
That seemed to offer them a favored view?

You ask the cause of this unseemly rush?
I'll tell you plainly, I was in the crush;
Some business called me to the town that day,
When meeting a legal friend upon his way
To hear some trial, as it was not far,
I went and with him sat within the bar.

Behind a long high desk of panel'd oak
The judge was seated, but he seldom spoke;
With hands uplifted resting on his head,
He listened calmly, while some plea was read;
His form seem'd feeble, long white silvery hair
Hung round his head and formed a halo there,
But his high brow and features sternly kind
Proclaim'd the vigor of a noble mind.

At a long table cover'd o'er with green
The lawyers sat, till one, with noble mein
Arose, and tossing back his iron-grey hair,
Addressed the judge. He spoke with legal care
Upon some point I did not understand,—
Until he turned, and pointing with his hand
At a poor youth who sat close to my side,
He said, "I move the prisoner now be tried."

There was a strange magnetic force displayed
In the few words the prosecutor said,
So that I fairly trembled when I saw
The dreadful power that lurks within the law.
I glanced at the young culprit in surprise,
And as I did so, met his deep blue eyes,
Looking as clear as heaven into mine,
The glistening tear drops made them brighter shine.

O God! that look I never can forget;
It haunts my life, in dreams I see it yet;
He seem'd so lonely there, no friend was near
In that dark hour to speak one word of cheer.
So close to me he sat, I could have laid
My hand upon his fingers as they played
One with the others resting on his lap;
The boy seemed wondering at his sad mishap.

Though but a country boy and plainly dress'd,
His honest features a strong mind confess'd ;
The bold, firm mouth reposed in stern control,
As if obedient to a dauntless soul
That had forbidden every sign of fear,
Though shame, or death itself was hovering near.
In one short moment all my soul was fired,—
I was his champion,—nothing more required,—
That he was pure, my mind was satisfied,
The verdict rendered ere the cause was tried.

At length the jury, chosen with great care,
Were quietly seated, and I heard them swear
To show no favor to the luckless youth,
But find a verdict on the side of truth ;
Then the attorney, rising for the state,
Began a dreadful story to relate
Of how a man, respected for his worth,
Of noble family and illustrious birth,
Just in the prime of life, before one stain
Had left its mark upon an honor'd name,
Was stricken down by an assassin's blow,
Murdered at noonday by an unseen foe.

Then many witnesses were call'd, who swore
They saw the dying man lie in his gore—
Heard him in death declare the prisoner's guilt,
And saw the dagger driven to the hilt.

Court then adjourned to meet the following day,
And the young prisoner ironed, was led away;
When near my side awhile compelled to stand,
I pressed a golden eagle in his hand;
His lips, so firm till now, broke all restraint,
They trembled, parted, but made no complaint,
One quivering gasp, a choking, smother'd cry,
The boy had fainted, and they dragged him by.

Within the court room time had quickly pass'd
And evening shadows now were gathering fast:
At my friend's home I spent a pleasant time
And heard this story of the prisoner's crime.
He was acquainted with the murder'd man,
One Edgar Traver—so the tale began,—
Had a rich father,—was an only child,—
A manly-looking youth, but always wild.

Upon the old man's land, the widow Earl
Lived in a cottage with her boy and girl;
A meagre pension their small wants supplied,
Since, on a battlefield, her husband died.
The girl was beautiful at seventeen,
Among the village belles she was the queen;
An artless manner and a wondrous grace
Gave added beauty to her lovely face.

Her brother John work'd for the farmers round,
But of an evening always could be found
Within his home, by his loved sister's side,
While the fond mother watched them both with pride.
He was the elder, you have seen his face
Within the court room, suffering from disgrace.
He was a serious, she a happy child,
Who though no evil, and at danger smiled.

One day young Edgar, from a distant school,
Returned, a handsome, educated fool.
Trained for the church, he could with pathos tell
The way to heaven, yet do the deeds of hell;
He met fair Jennie, and his lustful heart
Longed for her beauty, and with studied art,
Formed a vile plan to win her youthful love,
While talking sweetly of a heaven above.

His plans succeeded; often they would walk
Down the quiet country road, and fondly talk
Of the bright future which before them lay,
While with raised eyes, the villain seem'd to pray.
The weeks flew by till on one Sunday night,
A college chum performed the marriage rite.

The widow'd mother blest them, while great tears
Rolled down her wrinkled cheeks. She sadly hears
Them talking gaily of a marriage trip,
Though from some words the treacherous groom let slip,
She learned that Edgar's father did not know
His son was married, or where he would go.
The rich young fop thus won fair Jennie's hand
And bore her off to a far distant land.

Ere one short year had passed the bride returned,
Sad and deserted, yet her heart still yearn'd,
For the cold, cruel man who wreck'd her life,
And then 'mid strangers left a loving wife,
Yet not in anger, but with snivelling tears,
Whispering his love for her, he disappears.

For anxious weeks she watched for his lov'd face
Until, by want compell'd, she left the place,
And parting with some jewels, sought once more
With heavy heart to reach her mother's door
Carrying her infant girl close to her breast,
Who paid in smiles when tenderly caressed ;
She reached the cottage—it was in the night—
From a small window beamed a feeble light,—
With beating heart, with slow and cautious tread,
She look'd within—her mother lay there dead.

With dismal shrieks that echoed far and wide,
She reached the corpse and kneeling by the side
Of her dead mother, cried in anguish wild
"O mother, mother! speak to your poor child!"
She felt a hand rest softly on her head,
Then turned, her brother stood beside the dead.

With choking sobs and trembling voice, he told
How ere she died, the mother wish'd to hold
Once more her wandering daughter to her breast,
As in the years gone by she oft was prest,—
Stroke the fair head and kiss the absent face
And wash away with tears her girl's disgrace.

The funeral scarcely over ere there came
A written order in the landlord's name,
Expelling the two orphans from the place
So long their home. It told of the disgrace
A noble family suffered since the day
Their pious, only son was led astray
By the sweet voice and false, deceitful tongue,
Of her whose actions all their hearts had wrung.

There was no helping hand, no needed friend
Would offer them a home, lest they offend
The angry father, or the pamper'd son,
Who spurned the girl his honey'd lips had won.

Stung with remorse, she fled from there at night,
And from her childhood's home has vanished quite,
A rumor said she sought a neighboring state
And left her infant at a stranger's gate,
Then hastening to a river-side, had thrown
Her body in that stream, and died unknown.
The homeless boy now driven to despair,
Had wept, and prayed for strength, his grief to bear.

While thus distracted, on a pleasant day,
Down a lone country road he chanced to stray,
And meeting Edgar Traver face to face,
He charged him with his sister's deep disgrace
Beg'd him at least to own his drownéd wife,
To save their child from a dishonor'd life ;
The rich young scoundrel, with a savage blow
Full in the face, struck down his boyish foe.

So unexpected, undeserved the act,
The boy was helpless in the foul attack;
He fell, but in an instant, wild with rage,
Sprang to his feet, in battle they engage,
One then must die. To end the desperate strife
He wrenched from Edgar's hand the fatal knife,
And, in a frenzy, killed the coward knave
Who drove fair Jennie to her watery grave.

Another day ; another motly crowd
Gathered within the court house. When allow'd
I reached the bar, my legal friend was there,
Led by his hand I found a vacant chair ;
The judge and jury all were in their place,
The prisoner's counsel with an anxious face,
The state's attorney walking up and down,
His handsome features darkened by a frown.

Then down the crowded aisle the prisoner walked,
A burly officer behind him stalked,
Pushing him onward to a vacant seat
And drop'd the handcuffs clanking at his feet,
Then close beside him sat, as if in fear
That rescue for the prisoner might be near :
A sudden rap, a silence—deep, intense,—
Proclaimed the day's proceedings would commence.

The prisoner's lawyer now began to speak,
By owning frankly that his case was weak,
Beg'd deep attention while he tried to show
That maddening wrongs had caused the fatal blow ;
His voice rang out, clear as the Sabbath bell,
And like it, strove of Mercy's power to tell.
I felt how much I had misjudg'd the man,
Who spoke for the poor boy. When he began
He seemed so youthful, so unfit to bear
The weighty shield his client needed there.

But all was changed as he went on to plead,
His soul awoke and boldly took the lead,
Assumed control of movement, form and face,
Gave fire to passion and to pathos grace,
Spoke from the features, by a motion cursed,
His eyes enforcing while his lips rehearsed;
His body swayed obedient as the trees
That bend their giant branches to the breeze.

His only plea was mercy for the youth,
His only weapon was the simple truth;
Lifting some papers, which he scarcely read,
He threw them fiercely down and quickly said:
"By the stern law, a guilty murderer dies,
And justice sanctions it with blinded eyes,
But mercy lingers round a culprit's head
To shield the victim from a fate so dread.

There is on earth no treasure like a home,
Be it a snow-thatched roof or gilded dome;
Build it of snow and ice, of wood or stone,
And there a mother's love can rear a throne:
The savage bear will guard her lonely den
With gnashing teeth, against approaching men—
Wounded, still struggle for her trembling cubs,
And e'en in dying crunch the hunter's clubs.

"The timid bird will hover 'round her nest
While the foul snake is striking at her breast;
Heedless of danger recklessly she flies
To shield her young, or with them, screaming dies.
Shall man alone stand idly, meekly by,
With folded arms, or meanly turn and fly,
While a vile monster, with foul, poison'd breath,
Attacks his loved ones, driving them to death?"

The burning words I never may recall,
He told the story of a woman's fall,
Tracing her life, and painting with his breath
The path of vice that leads to woe and death;
Then speaking slowly gave the low command,
"John Earl, the prisoner, go upon the stand."

A deadly silence brooded on the place
As the young prisoner rose with native grace,
And walking slowly to the witness' chair,
Refused to sit, but stood and waited there.
How calm he seem'd so near the dreadful rope;
Could he alone with frowning justice cope?
Could a poor boy expect to find some flaw
To open an escape from the stern law?
Yet he seem'd fearless, and his noble form,
Erect and bold. So, often in a storm
The giant oak will scarcely bow or bend,
Though wind and lightnings seem the heavens to rend.

In clear, plain language and an easy tone,
He told his story. He did not disown
His hand had done the deed, but made the claim
That he was frenzied by a sister's shame.
Then with one hand upon the prisoner's head,
Urging acquital, thus his counsel said:

"Defend this boy and shield him by the power
The law has placed within your hands this hour;
The sword of justice use, but use aright
To guard the pure, the guilty ones to smite.
That wicked wretch, who rush'd from crime to crime,
Secure by wealth and favor for a time,
At length was brought to bay and met his fate;
For sin will meet with vengeance, soon or late.

"Men of the jury, chosen for this hour,
Within your hands there rests a greater power
Than kings can claim, or emperor ever saw,
The right of doing right above all law.
The honored judge is bound by many vows;
He only echoes what the law allows,
He is the head, the tongue, the living brain,
You are the throbbing heart that will not deign
To wear a fetter or to own a peer—
A sovereign power the guilty only fear."

After a recess order'd by the court,
The state's attorney rose, and said he thought
His duty to the state was now to show
That it was malice caused the fatal blow;
The crime admitted, they must try to find
The motive strong that ruled the prisoner's mind,
When on that day he met his sister's friend
Alone. To murder him, did he intend?

The prisoner's story of a desperate fight,
If true, would not, by law, permit his right
To kill the man who, when insulted, turned
And push'd the fellow back he rightly spurned.
"Lives there a man whose life has not been blur'd
By youthful faults? Few live who have not err'd.

Admit that Edgar Traver may have led
The girl astray he falsely seem'd to wed.
When she discovered that the sacred rite,
Binding him to her on their wedding night,
Was all a sham—the priest a college chum,—
Had she then left him, scandal would be dumb;
But no! with open eyes and none to blame,
She chose the downward life of sin and shame.

"The State now leaves her interests in your hands;
Defend the laws, on them all justice stands.
A juror's duty is to keep his oath,
And punish crime, to check its rapid growth.
'Avenge my death,' a voice cries from the grave,
'Deny him mercy, who no mercy gave.'
Blood, guilty blood has left a crimson stain
Where on the ground, a murdered corpse has lain.
To cleanse that blot and raise her honor high
The State now calls for vengeance; heed her cry."

The jury rose, while, with an easy grace,
The judge, in simple words, reviewed the case,
Gave well known rules to guide the jury's mind
And urged them carefully a verdict find.
Then to their room the jury slowly passed,
But not one look was on the prisoner cast.
Scanning them closely, I could see the trace
Of stupid hatred on each stolid face,
And feared the poor unfriended boy would find,
How seldom mercy sways the human mind.

The evening shadows rested on the court
Before the jury this sad verdict brought,
"Guilty of murder in the first degree."
Oh! dreadful! and so full of misery!

Then court adjourned. I heard the heedless throng,
In fiendish glee, applaud the dreadful wrong.
The boy seemed pleased to have me near his side.
I took his hand, he bowed his head and cried ;
Softly I whisper'd, " Have you any friend
To whom a message now you wish to send?"
"Oh, no! oh, no!" he cried, "I am alone,
And none, save you, have any kindness shown.
Though I must die, yet, oh! how glad I be,
My poor old mother did not live to see
What Jennie suffered or what I must bear.
Since those I loved are dead, why need I care?"

Off to a dungeon, 'neath the death-watch eye,
They dragged the helpless victim, soon to die.
I saw him once again, oh! horrid sight,
Beneath a dangling rope, dress'd all in white.
It was a gala day, a laughing crowd,
Some perched on fences, others were allowed
Within the gates, to see an honest youth
Killed by the law, who only told the truth.
He kissed his hand to me, then, bowed in prayer.
The bolt was drawn and left him hanging there.

The overseer retired, saying with a bow,
"You know the pretty foundling's history now."

Time is like a rushing river,
  Years are but the waves that show
As they hurry on forever,
  Something of its rapid flow :
Lives are like the bubbles on it,
  Thrown together, torn apart,
Often breaking on another,
  Often bursting as they start.

Days and weeks chase one another,
  Months glide quickly into years;
Summer's smiles and Autumn's gladness
  End in Winter's frozen tears.
Five swift years have passed since Daisy,
  Like a rose bud, thrown away
On misfortunes stormy waters,
  Stranded and neglected lay.

Patient, faithful, loving Maggie—
  Angels came for her one day —
Found her on a bed of suffering,
  Bore her soul on wings away ;
Now her dreams are real and endless ;
  She is standing by the Throne,
And her husband's voice is joining
  In loud praises with her own.

It was winter in the country;
Snow, in mimic mountains piled,
Blushed beneath a golden sunset
And in borrowed beauty smiled.
In a chamber of the poorhouse
Pale and wasted, Daisy lay
Sleeping, while the matron seated,
Watched the sunbeams o'er her play.

From her slumber quickly starting,
With a joyful wondering stare,
Pointing with her finger upward,
Daisy whispered, "Mamma 's there!
Has my mamma come from heaven?
Will she take me up there, too?
Tell me how the children live there,
Are the angels just like you?"

The kind matron pressed the ringlets
Back from off the pallid face,
Kissed away some lingering tear drops,
Told her of that happy place—

There the mother can hear the dull crash of a tear
As it rolls down her orphan girl's cheek,
And the heart's bitter sigh, or the lip's feeble cry,
In the voice of a cataract speak.

There the husband will know how his partner below
Struggles hard with the trials of life,
And her cheeks will oft burn at his sudden return,
For in dreams he will visit his wife.

There the lame fly on wings, there the dumb pauper sings,
And the beggar, blind, wretched and old,
There is blest with new sight and is dressed in pure white
And his feet tread on pavements of gold.

The poor, down-trodden slave, as he passed through the grave,
Threw his chains and his shackels away;
There filter'd through dust from all vileness and lust
Finds his soul to be clearer than day.

The babe tightly pressed to a mother's warm breast,
When by death like an enemy found,
Vain the mother's wild shrieks, vain for rescue she seeks,
As she lays the cold form in the ground.

But in heaven all's clear and when there 'twill appear
That God's love is both tender and sure,
And then we shall find He is never more kind,
Then when taking the good and the pure.

Though the matron's voice was trembling,
  There was gladness in her song;
Faith was reason, doubt was treason,
  Hope was real and love was strong;
As the foundling lay and listen'd,
  Death with fingers freezing cold,
Closed her ears and eyes forever.
  Then the matron's song grew bold.

"Oh! happy soul Thy night is passed,
Now glorious morning breaks at last,
Unfetter'd from a world of woe
To rise and leave the chains below.

"Thy loving eyes and tender lips
Are closed and still in death's eclipse,
We only can the shadow see,
'Tis dark to us, but bright to Thee.

"Then let our songs like incense rise,
In tuneful fragrance to the skies,
And join her in her heavenward flight
Up from this earth's cold gloom and night.

"Oh! wondrous change from death to life
And constant joy for pain and strife,
The king has come to claim his own
And place a pauper near his throne."

With the moon at midnight shining
Through the window 'round the bed,
The good matron, softly singing,
Watched beside the silent dead.
Then there enter'd quickly stepping,
With a smile, the overseer.
Sitting down beside the matron,
Thus addressed her with a sneer:

"Can music stir the heavy ear of death,
Or songs restore again the banished breath?
Can faith or fancy—call it what you may—
Cause smiles once more around those lips to play?
No! no! death never loosens his cold grip,
Nor lets the victim from his clutches slip.
Else it might tell how false the silly story
That from the grave we step right into glory.

"Once I believed those fables too, and thought
That human suffering was but angel's sport,
That to be happy by the golden rule
Was to be half a knave and quite a fool;
'Twas years ago when I a thoughtless youth
Met a fair girl, and trusted in her truth.
With honied words I told my burning love,
And won the heart of a pure, gentle dove.

"Awhile her sunny spirit warmed my soul,
I drank new pleasure from a brimming bowl.
Her faith and hope of heaven soon kindled mine,
Until we bowed together at one shrine.
Oh! happy days, the happiest of my life
When in the village church, beside my wife,
I sat and listened to her heavenly voice,
Whisper in prayer, or in sweet song rejoice.

"From her 'Old Hundred' gained a sudden youth,
While mingling music with her words of truth,
And stately 'Sessions' moving like a queen,
In robes of rhyme, assumed a loftier mein;
Sad weeping 'China' every note a tear,
Forgot the mourner and forsook the bier,
Vied with her sister 'Zypher' in sweet strains
Until I cried in rapture, 'Jesus Reigns.'

"For months the pastor, from his little book,
In threadbare phrases and with careless look,
Read of a mercy that he did not feel,
With lips of velvet, but a heart of steel;
The sleepy deacons, sitting in a row,
With backward nods their deep attention show,
Until perchance one bending to the floor
Awoke the others by a startling snore.

" The straining choir, struggling with their notes,
Flung mangled prayers screaming from their throats.
Oh! it was dreadful, all a horrid sham,
It mocked my soul and made me what I am.
Awhile by Marion's faith and love controlled,
I hid the doubts that o'er my spirit roll'd
Until like ships that on the ocean part,
I drifted backward and it broke her heart.

" Oh memory! close thy pages from my sight
And hide the record of that dreadful night,
When—scarce a year had passed since we were wed—
I found my own sweet loving Marion dead.
Since then my restless spirit, tempest-tossed,
Is like a vessel on the ocean lost,
No hand to guide it, to no haven bound,
Useless while floating worthless were it found.

" Within these walls a safe retreat I find,
Another world, just suited to my mind,
Where I can see and study human woe
And trace deep scars back to the cruel blow.
Within a shroud this lovely child at rest,
Smiles even now, as if completely blest ;
Yet the dark shadow of another's shame
Hangs o'er her now and hides her very name.

"I hate the social laws that drive a dart,
With vicious hatred, through a woman's heart—
Pursues the helpless, clutches at the weak,
Wounds the defenseless, smites an infant's cheek;
Yet softly whispers to the great and strong,
'Your ways are sinful and your course is wrong.
Obey my rules and precepts when you can,
And if you don't, why then you are a man.'

"Were half the doctrines true of heaven and hell
Nature herself would be the first to tell,
Write it upon the mountain's frowning crest,
And sound it from ocean's heaving breast.
Yet there 's a law around us like the sky,
Above the reach of man, so pure, so high,
That holds the world beneath a governing rod,
I call it Nature, you may call it God.

"See your poor nurse how bitterly she weeps,
The tears belie the words 'She only sleeps';
No death is death, and nature will be heard
In the deep groan, though silent every ward.
Death on that face has left a rigid smile;
As if forgotten it remains awhile,
Soon, 'neath the snow it will be hid from sight
Within a pauper's grave. Good night! Good night!"

On the morning of the morrow,
In the graveyard for the poor,
Two old laborers slowly shoveling
Through the snowdrifts, white and pure;
Formed a pathway from the poorhouse
To the lonely, nameless graves
That unletter'd, and neglected,
Lay in ghostly, snowy waves.

Then with sharpened bars and axes
Long they labor, hard the toil,
Drilling frozen sods asunder,
Chopping through the flinty soil—
Formed a little grave for Daisy
In the warmer ground below,
Where the orphan girl may slumber,
Where no bitter tears shall flow.

In the evening, as the sunset
Draped the heavens in blue and gold,
See them coming, 'tis a funeral,
Yet no solemn bell is toll'd.
In a roughly fashion'd coffin
On a little wooden sleigh
Daisy often used when living,—
Now it bears her lifeless clay.

A young woman, halting, limping,
Heads the funeral, draws the hearse,
While the noble looking matron
Walks behind it with a nurse;
Next to them a youthful cripple
Drags his helpless limbs along,
Joining with a choir of children
In a plaintive, farewell song.

Death is lonely when surrounded
With the greatest pomp and show,
Mournful music, funeral dirges,
Long processions moving slow.
When returning from the service
All the seeming sorrow ends,
Gay the music, quick the marching,
Loud the laughter of the friends.

But one carriage, closely curtain'd,
Holds the real mourner there,
'Tis perhaps a widowed mother—
Bending o'er a child in prayer.
There's a selfishness in sorrow,
There's a preciousness in grief,—
Then all worldly aims are worthless,
Heaven alone can give relief.

To the matron life was glorious,
Death was but a hyphen dark,
Joining everlasting brightness
To a feeble glimmering spark.
So she traveled life's dull pathway,
Scattering everywhere her love,
Only waiting, often wishing,
Soon to reach her home above.

At the open grave they gather
While the laborers waiting there,
Lower the body, as the matron
Offered up a simple prayer.
Soon by heavy clods surrounded,
Far from any kindred dust,
The poor foundling girl is slumbering
'Neath the earth's cold frozen crust.

REMARKS.

"THE FOUNDLING" is a story, in which many of the incidents related are true, and it may teach some lessons from the conduct of the actors, and the character of the play; for events teach without argument, yet it should always be remembered that severity in judgment is a relic of barbarism, Christianity teaching that even the common events of life, cannot be understood correctly, until after the dark curtain of death has fallen, and the first act in the drama of life is ended, and the actors hurry away to appear before the great audience of heaven, and there find that many of the strange scenes in which they had a part upon earth, were wisely planned and designed by the great manager of the Universe.

Reading the story of Daisy, may call attention to the good that is being done by public charity; for while private benevolence is right and praiseworthy, it fails to reach many who need help, and who would suffer, were it not for the great institutions of charity that bless our land.

The story is told in verse and rhyme, to make it easy and pleasant reading; perhaps an excuse should be given for writing in that style, when so many readers dislike even the sight of poetry; but no apology will be made; so let the loud jest be hurled at poetry and the savage thrust given—yet will the beauty of verse rise like a dove above the reach of its enemies, and escape their vain efforts to destroy it, and somewhere a window of approbation will be open, and somehow the frightened bird find it, and entering, find friends among whom it will be gladly welcomed, and be fondly protected by those who love it.

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